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ABSTRACT

The amount and type of household responsibility expected of African-American children continues to be overlooked in the literature. This study examined the relationship between familial structure and the amount and type of assigned child household duties. Data was obtained from a subset utilized in the National Survey of Family Household data, collected between March 1987 and May 1988. Analyses were limited to African-American families (N=235) who had children aged 19 and younger and who reported having children doing household chores. The analysis indicated at least four components of familial structure that appear to be important predictors of child household responsibility. The presence of more children and having older children were indicative of increased household responsibility. Gender effects were significant for one household chore, dishwashing, with daughters in these families spending a disproportionate amount of time on this task; otherwise, evidence of gender typing was found to a much lesser degree than in past investigations excluding African Americans. This may be an indication that African-American families are more egalitarian in their attitudes not only regarding household tasks but also in their socialization of boys and girls. Contrary to previous findings, marital status did not impact child household duties. However, because single-parent households are so prominent they may be starting to resemble and function as dual-parent households. Failure to find a significant relationship between either number of adults or income level and child household duties was also unexpected. (ABL)

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Analysis of the Effect of Familial Composition on Child Household Responsibility

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Abstract

Although the role of the African-American child as maternal confidante, has been explored extensively in the literature, other aspects of child role have been ignored. One area that continues to be overlooked concerns the amount and type of household responsibility expected of African-American children. Through secondary data analysis, the present study examines the relationship between familial structure and the amount and type of assigned child household duties. The identification of factors influencing child household role is not only important in and of itself but also has implications for the way in which children are socialized within diverse familial structures.

INTRODUCTION

Factors such as death, divorce and unemployment, leading to more single-parent households and increased participation of women in the work force have had serious ramifications on family life, particularly for African-Americans (Glick, 1981). Distribution of household duties and child socialization are just a few areas of family life that have been affected.

Although, previous research has demonstrated the relationship between child household labor and other areas of research including: development of prosocial behavior, fostering of responsibility, acquisition of gender roles and development of a strong work ethic, there continues to be a dearth of research in this area (Goodnow, 1988).

The present study addresses some of these gaps in the literature by identifying and examining familial influences on child household responsibilities. A brief review of the literature will further emphasize the need for more extensive research in the area of child household contribution.

Factors Influencing Child Household Participation

Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status as defined by parental education and income level play an integral role in the meaning and value attributed to child household duties. These factors affect the length of time children work and payment of monetary rewards. Past research has found that parents with higher education and economic status consider child household responsibilities as a reciprocal obligation and are less likely to pay children for

their efforts. However, families with lower-status and higher workloads, such as those with working mothers, attribute extrinsic meaning to such tasks and are more likely to offer payment (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). However, children in these families also spend significantly more time on household tasks.

Dual-Parent Households

Past research has revealed that parental marital and employment status jointly determine the amount, type and relative time children are expected to spend on household tasks.

Parents in both dual and single earning homes have been found to be highly sex-role segregated in their household task behavior. However, children in these homes have been found to be less so. This may be an indication that parents are viewing their children less rigidly than they viewed themselves and that they may be changing previously held stereotypes (Hilton & Haldeman, 1981).

Single-Parent Households

Single-parent homes are becoming increasingly prominent. It has been consistently noted that children in these homes assume greater responsibility at an earlier age and as a result mature sooner than their counterparts living in dual-parent homes. These children are expected to become "partners in the household and do not have the option of simply being kids (Weiss, 1979).

Age

Regardless of age, children are capable of being productive family members. In a study observing 2 and 3 year old children, youngsters were observed to "spontaneously and promptly" assist adults in a variety of house-hold tasks (Rheingold, 1982). Older children residing in both urban and rural environments reportedly do more housework than do their younger siblings (Lawrence & Wozniak, 1987). Despite differences in locale, most of the chores in both groups consist of shopping and maintenance of the home, yard, car and family pets.

Sibling Pattern and Number of Children

Patterns in the literature reveal that households with larger sizes generally assign more tasks and that the greater the number of siblings in the home, the more "feminine" in nature the tasks of all the children (i.e. cooking, washing and ironing). Another major finding of these investigations has been that households containing sibling groups of mixed gender tend to engage in significant amounts of sex-typing behavior (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981).

Gender

Research on child household labor has consistently contained evidence of sex-typing. This form of stereotyping is so pervasive that it transcends age, locale, familial structure, marital status, income and educational level (Lawrence & Wozniak, 1987). Both males and females appear to be prejudged and stereotyped as to what they are and are not "capable" of doing. Such practices have serious implications for the way in which

males and females are socialized not only regarding household duties but also for other areas such as the job market (Duckett et. al, 1989).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study is unique in that it examines the role of African-American children in diverse familial structures. In particular, it explores the household duties of African-American children as a function of familial structure as indicated by factors such as marital status and number of children in the household. Previous research in this area has usually either neglected African-American children or has blindly applied findings based on other groups to African-Americans.

Given the findings of previously cited research, several hypotheses were formulated. It was hypothesized that the presence of additional adults and children in the household would decrease child responsibility. On the other hand, families with single-parents, less children and lower income would have greater responsibility. In addition, older children were expected to have greater household responsibility than younger children. Overall, female children were expected to have the greatest amount of household responsibility and to be doing a disproportionate amount of the household chores.

METHODS

Subjects

Data was obtained from a subset utilized in the National Survey of Family and Household data, collected between March 1987 and May 1988. This probability sample contained 13,017 respondents from 100 sampling regions in the United States. The main

sample was comprised of 9,643 primary respondents with a double sampling of minorities. Individuals aged 19 and older were randomly selected as target respondents. A self-administered questionnaire was also given to the cohabitating spouse or partner of the primary respondent. Detailed description of these data appear elsewhere (Bumpass & Sweet, 1988).

Due to the underlying theoretical concerns of this research, analyses were limited to African American families. These families had to have children aged 19 and younger living in the household. Although 1,996 Black families with children were identified, only 661 of these families reported having children doing household chores. Another 426 cases had systematically missing data regarding household duties and other pertinent information, resulting in a final sample size of 235 households. Table 1 summarizes basic demographic information and provides descriptive statistics.

Variables

Table 2 presents the dependent and independent variables used in the study. Respondents answers were coded in response to questions regarding participation in household chores by those aged 19 and younger. The dependent variable, child household responsibility, consisted of the 4 best and most representative questions pertaining to child household duties. The 7 independent variables cover various facets of familial structure. Table 3 shows the correlations of the dependent variables.

Because information was not individually provided for each child, each focal child's household responsibilities were taken to be indicative of all the other children's duties in the household.

Model Analyses

Logistic regression was conducted in order to determine whether missing data was randomly or systematically missing. The procedure revealed that information was systematically missing on marital status ($p<.001$) and education level ($p<.0001$).

Principal component factor analysis was performed on the dependent variables in order to determine the most appropriate and representative outcome variables for the sample. Through this procedure, it was determined that only one factor was necessary in order to adequately represent the data, accounting for 44% of the explained variance. This factor was comprised of the four items: washing dishes, cleaning house, outdoor tasks and washing and ironing, collectively referred to as chores. TABLE 4 shows the factor loadings for the variables used in the analyses. Multivariate Regression Analysis was used in order to identify the familial structure variables most influential on child household responsibilities.

Planned comparisons were also conducted on the data. This procedure split the data and sorted cases by gender. All hypotheses were tested at the $p<.05$ level of significance.

RESULTS

Multivariate Regression Analysis

Results of Multivariate analyses are presented in Table 5. The overall multivariate regression model was significant, as indicated by Wilks Lambda, $F=3.12$, ($p<.0001$) and explained 31% of the variance. Findings indicate that number of children

($p<.001$) and child age ($p<.001$) significantly and independently predict all levels of child household responsibility.

Gender differences were found for one household chore, dishwashing ($p<.05$), with females doing a disproportionate amount of this task. This was the most time spent on any single household duty ($M=4.2$ hours).

Respondent's educational was also found to be a significant predictor of washing and ironing activity ($p<.05$). In particular, the amount of washing and ironing expected of the child increased with the education level of respondent.

Marital status, income level and number of adults were not significant predictors of child household duties.

Planned Comparisons

Planned comparisons were used in order to determine whether there were differences between the responses of males ($N=64$) and females ($N=171$). Significant results were found for the overall model of both comparisons, Wilks Lambda .39 ($p<.001$), for males and Wilks Lambda .65, ($p<.001$), for females. Results showed that the gender disparity for dishwashing was only reported among females ($p<.05$). TABLE 6 shows the results of the first planned comparison.

Results of the second planned comparison are summarized in Table 7. This procedure revealed that respondent's education level was a significant predictor of washing and ironing ($p<.05$) only among male respondents. In particular, the amount of dishwashing expected of the child increased with education level of male respondents.

DISCUSSION

At least four components of familial structure appear to be important predictors of child household responsibility. As hypothesized number of children and child age are significant predictors of child household responsibility. More specifically, the presence of more children and having older children are indicative of increased household responsibility. These findings support those of past research exploring other cultural groups (Colge & Tasker, 1982).

Gender effects were only significant for one household chore, dishwashing, with daughters in these families spending a disproportionate amount of time on this task. Although previous research has consistently reported similar findings, evidence of gender typing was found to a much lesser degree in the present study than in past investigations excluding African Americans.

This may be an indication that African American families are more egalitarian in their attitudes not only regarding household tasks but also in their socialization of boys and girls.

The fact that gender disparities were reported only among women in the sample, suggests that mothers and fathers may view their children differently. These dissimilar perceptions may impact the way in which parents socialize male and female children. Gilbert (1982) reported similar findings, in a study examining parental expectations.

It may also be possible that mothers are relying on their daughters more in terms of providing instrumental support. At least one study has found that daughters of full time working mothers are twice as likely to do dishwashing (Cogle & Tasker, 1982).

Moreover, childcare and socialization have traditionally been the primary

responsibility of mothers rather than fathers. Mothers are largely responsible for child and household maintenance (Burns & Homel, 1989). Therefore, fathers may be less attuned to and aware of gender differences in chore assignments. The finding that education level impacted the assignment of child household responsibility is also consistent with past research. Increased education level led to increased participation of children in household duties. Past research has found that parents with higher education and economic status consider child household responsibilities to be a reciprocal obligation and so may be less hesitant to involve children. However, it was surprising to find that the relationship between higher education and child duties was only reported among males respondents. Since prior investigations have not examined these particular variables' (washing and ironing) effect in terms of respondent's or parental gender, it is difficult to determine if this finding is unique to African American families.

Contrary to previous findings, marital status did not impact child household duties. However, because single-parent households are so prominent, they may be starting to resemble and function as dual-parent households. This overlap may make it increasingly difficult to elucidate differences between the two groups.

Failure to find a significant relationship between either number of adults or income level and child household duties was also unexpected. However, upon further examination it is possible that these two factors may have been confounded with marital status and education level, respectively making it difficult to establish the unique influences of these variables on child household duties. Certain limitations of the data, warrant that these findings be viewed with caution. The present investigation was

conducted on secondary rather than primary data. While this practice has many advantages associated with it, there are also many problems that are unique to this form of data analysis.

Difficulties associated with this specific project include missing data, due to either miscodings or inappropriate lines of questioning which made the scope of analysis much narrower. This was particularly true with regards to the income variable.

Another problem was the loss of a significant amount of information because some household variables were categorized under the umbrella term of 'all those aged 19 and under'. Other tasks only provided information regarding the focal child, which made it difficult to extrapolate findings to other children in the home.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study are useful for gaining insight into several areas including: familial structure and interaction, child socialization, stress and psychological functioning, particularly regarding African Americans.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that children are contributing to household tasks. This assistance appears to be most influenced by the number of children present in the household and child's age. However, female children may be doing more than their fair share, particularly with regards to dishwashing, female children are assuming a disproportionate amount of responsibility. The fact that the gender discrepancy concerning dishwashing was only reported among female respondents, emphasizes the fact that mothers and fathers have different perceptions of their children, particularly daughters. These divergent views may tend to influence their expectations. While

evidence of sex typing was found for dishwashing, it was reported much less than expected. This may be an indication that African American families are more egalitarian in their task division and socialization practices than other groups.

These findings are important to future investigations which need to examine more diverse samples in order to elucidate differences between cultural groups and to present a more accurate depiction of child household responsibility. Furthermore, as children begin to make even greater contributions to familial functioning, it is becoming increasingly important to emphasize their perspective by including them in studies such as these. Direct solicitation of their views regarding the amount and type of their own contributions to household functioning may prove more valuable than referring to the adults in the home.

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Table 1: Demographic Information and Descriptive Statistics (N=235)

VARIABLE	
Gender of Respondent	
Males	27.0%
Females	73.0%
Marital Status	
Married	54.0%
Single	46.0%
Respondent's Education Level	
Less than High School	20.9%
High School Degree	39.1%
More than High School	40.0%
Household Income	
0 -4999	14.0%
5000 -9999	14.5%
10000 -19999	20.4%
20000 -29999	16.6%
30000 -39999	12.8%
40000 -49999	8.1%
50000 -99999996	11.5%
Presence of another adult	
None	34.0%
1 Adult	53.2%
2 Adults	8.1%
3 or more	4.7%
Number of Children	
None	32.3%
1 child	34.0%
2 children	19.1%
Sex of Focal Child	
Male	52.8%
Female	46.8%
Age of Focal Child	
Mean Age	12.0
Standard Deviation	4.0
3 or more	14.5%

Table 2: Independent and Dependent Variables

Independent Variables - Family Structure Variables:

Respondent's Marital Status
Respondent's Education Level
Household Income
Number of Adults in Household
Number of Children in Household
Sex of Child
Age of Child

Dependent Variables - Child Household Responsibilities:

Washing Dishes
Cleaning House
Outdoor Tasks
Washing and Ironing

Table 3: Pearson Product-Moment Correlations (N=235)

Dependent Variables

	Dishes	Clean	Outdoor	Wash/Iron
Dishes	4.37173*			
Clean	.55948	3.78899		
Outdoor	.31556	.38813	3.05280	
Wash/Iron	.16994	.22827	.15965	1.98044

Standard Deviations along diagonal

Table 4: Factor Analysis of Dependent Variables (N=342)

	Factor Loadings**
Household Chore	
Wash Dishes	.900
Clean House	.892
Outdoor Tasks	.866
Washing and Ironing	.847

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy=.817 Bartlett Test of Sphericity=877.14274, p<.00001

Note: Orthogonal Rotation. Only factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 are included

Table 5:
Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses for Child Household Duties

Washing Dishes:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	.573	.092	1.33	.183
Household Income	-.015	-.006	-.090	.928
Marital Status	1.49	.158	1.91	.057
Number of Adults	-.617	-.085	-1.09	.276
Number of Children	1.32	.291	4.68	.000**
Sex of Child	-.848	-.125	-2.07	.039**
Age of Child	-.389	.328	5.10	.000**

Cleaning House:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	-.153	-.028	-.413	.679
Household Income	-.042	-.020	-.283	.777
Marital Status	.375	.046	.554	.580
Number of Adults	-.081	-.013	-.166	.868
Number of Children	1.06	.274	4.34	.000**
Sex of Child	-.127	-.022	-.359	.720
Age of Child	.294	.290	4.45	.000**

Outdoor Tasks:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	.088	.021	.296	.767
Household Income	-.039	-.024	-.319	.749
Marital Status	.048	.007	.089	.929
Number of Adults	.395	.082	1.00	.318
Number of Children	.499	.166	2.52	.012**
Sex of Child	.336	.075	1.17	.240
Age of Child	.161	.206	3.03	.003**

Washing and Ironing:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	.103	.037	.533	.594
Household Income	.091	.083	1.15	.251
Marital Status	.162	.038	.459	.646
Number of Adults	-.221	-.068	-.866	.387
Number of Children	.513	.250	3.99	.000**
Sex of Child	-.343	-.113	-1.85	.065
Age of Child	.177	.333	5.14	.000**

p<.05

Table 6: Planned Comparisons
Sex of Respondent = 1: Male N=64

Washing Dishes:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	1.06	.200	1.48	.143
Household Income	.058	.029	.229	.820
Marital Status	.869	.069	.579	.565
Number of Adults	-1.10	-.095	-.800	.427
Number of Children	1.57	.391	3.22	.002**
Sex of Child	.175	.045	.377	.707
Age of Child	.307	.299	2.40	.020**

Cleaning house:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	.473	.098	.729	.469
Household Income	-.220	-.124	-.952	.345
Marital Status	.366	.032	.269	.789
Number of Adults	.658	.063	.529	.599
Number of Children	1.42	.393	3.23	.002**
Sex of Child	.477	.135	1.13	.261
Age of Child	.297	.322	2.57	.013**

Outdoor Tasks:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	.359	.152	1.09	.276
Household Income	-.041	-.047	-.357	.722
Marital Status	-.255	-.046	-.372	.711
Number of Adults	-.696	-.137	-1.11	.271
Number of Children	.543	.306	2.44	.018**
Sex of Child	.190	.110	.899	.372
Age of Child	.127	.281	2.19	.032**

Washing and Ironing:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	.630	.247	2.08	.041**
Household Income	.010	.011	.096	.923
Marital Status	-.721	-.120	-1.13	.259
Number of Adults	-.362	-.065	-.625	.534
Number of Children	.714	.371	3.48	.001**
Sex of Child	-.347	-.185	-1.77	.081
Age of Child	.258	.526	4.80	.000**

p<.05

Table 7: Planned Comparisons
Sex of Respondent = 2: Female N=171

Washing Dishes:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	.416	.063	.807	.421
Household Income	-.092	-.033	-.406	.685
Marital Status	1.91	.191	1.96	.051
Number of Adults	-.583	-.082	-.899	.370
Number of Children	1.38	.290	4.05	.000**
Sex of Child	-.265	-.268	-3.83	.000**
Age of Child	.448	.359	4.87	.000**

Cleaning House:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	-.393	-.071	-.870	.385
Household Income	.031	.013	.160	.873
Marital Status	.306	.036	.361	.719
Number of Adults	-.226	-.037	-.398	.691
Number of Children	.999	.249	3.34	.001**
Sex of Child	-1.11	-.134	-1.84	.067
Age of Child	.315	.300	3.90	.000**

Outdoor Tasks:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	-.007	-.001	-.019	.984
Household Income	-.021	-.011	-.126	.899
Marital Status	.390	.055	.525	.600
Number of Adults	.502	.100	1.01	.313
Number of Children	.515	.153	1.97	.050**
Sex of Child	.585	.084	1.10	.270
Age of Child	.170	.194	2.42	.016**

Washing and Ironing:

Variable	B	Beta	t-value	p<
Education Level	-.100	-.034	-.411	.681
Household Income	.107	.088	1.00	.315
Marital Status	.414	.094	.907	.366
Number of Adults	-.331	-.105	-1.08	.279
Number of Children	.458	.217	2.84	.005**
Sex of Child	-.307	-.070	-.944	.346
Age of Child	.149	.272	3.45	.001**

p<.05